

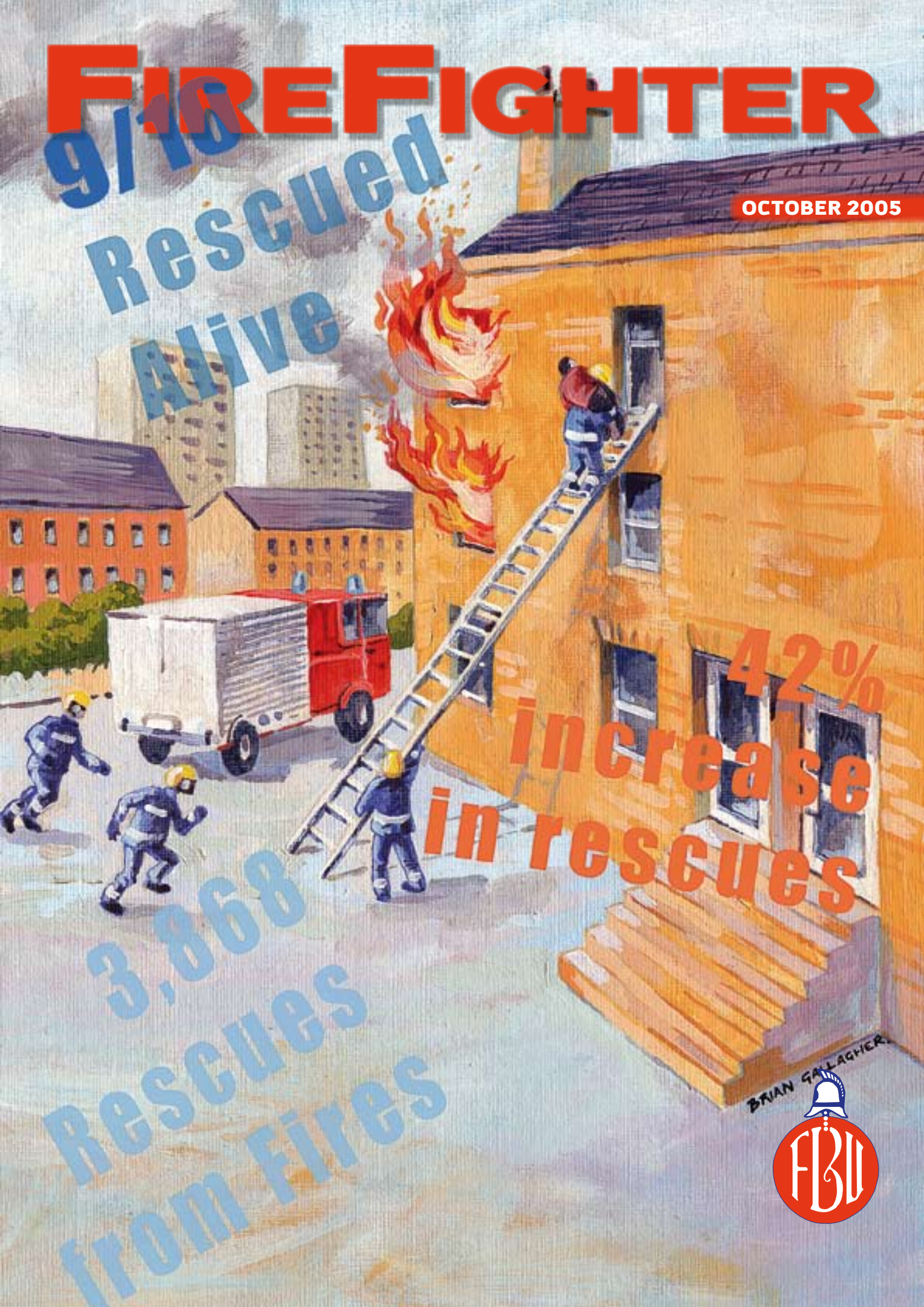
FIRE FIGHTER

9/10
Rescued
Alive

OCTOBER 2005

42%
increase
in rescues

3,868
Rescues
from Fires



BRIAN GALLAGHER



Support our Suffolk

AS WE go to press the industrial dispute in Suffolk continues. FBU members there have taken part in several periods of discontinuous strike action in opposition to cuts in fire cover and to job losses.

It is a big step to take strike action and one that nobody takes lightly. Our Suffolk members are flying the flag for all of us. They are sending a message that the cuts-driven agenda has to change.

They deserve the support of all of us and I hope that you will consider giving support financially to the Hardship Fund. I would also urge you to consider paying a visit to one of the picket lines. A first-hand account from someone involved is better than 100 magazine articles.

Control regionalisation

In August the Government announced the locations for seven of the proposed sites for their regional fire controls in England. They did so at a time when Parliament was in recess and when most political activity had stopped for the summer.

It is extremely regrettable that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister appears intent on pressing ahead with this scheme despite all the professional and financial arguments which have been presented. FBU members have also been angered at the way the widespread opposition to regionalization has been ignored.

Our campaign against these plans goes on. We will have to consider our next steps. The Executive Council will be discussing this issue and local meetings will also be held. I urge



I appeal to all members and officials of the Fire Brigades Union to unite in defence of our controls, our pensions and our conditions. Unity is Strength.

members to attend local meetings and I urge all members to unite in defence of our local fire controls and the FBU members who work in them.

Pensions

You will also be aware that along with other public sector workers we face proposals for change to our pensions. In relation to the Firefighters Pension Scheme, the proposals have just been published. The union will ensure that all members are fully informed about the suggested new scheme and the proposed changes for existing members.

Our team of Campaign Coordinators – from every region and section – have been working to help produce material to keep members informed. I urge all FBU members to participate in this discussion – pensions changes will have an impact on all of us.

We shall face detailed discussions on this issue and we have already drawn on advice from pensions specialists at Thompsons solicitors and from pensions actuaries. We shall ensure that the best professional case is presented on your behalf but nothing can replace the active involvement of members in a campaign like this.

Steve Godward

The magazine this month includes an article about Brother Steve Godward. It is the union's view that Steve was victimised by his employers in the West Midlands as a result of participation in our industrial action in 2002. He won an appeal at the ODPM and at that point he should

members

have been reinstated. It is absolutely scandalous that a fire authority can ignore such a decision and can be seen to rip up agreed procedures in this way.

The union can be proud of the fact that we have continued to support Steve and his family. I don't want to see Steve Godward become one of the forgotten victims of the pay dispute. We said at the start of the long running pay campaign – "Out together, Stick together, Back together."

Unfortunately, Steve is not back yet. His case remains one of the unsettled issues from the past three years. I hope that as you read Steve's story you will recall the old trade union slogan, "An injury to one is an injury to all." Steve's case highlights the importance of that principle. To allow an employer to victimise one person strengthens them to carry on and victimise others and ultimately to weaken us all. That is why individual cases like that of Steve Godward need to be fought by all of us.

Farewell to Mike Fordham

On 1st September our Assistant General Secretary, Mike Fordham, retired after 26 years service as a full-time official of the union. Mike will be remembered for his extremely detailed knowledge of fire service matters. Many FBU members will recall his detailed explanations of the old pay formula at the union's national schools. He was widely respected by people within the service and in the wider fire industry regardless of any disagreements people may have had with him.

I certainly had my arguments

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and disagreements with Mike. Nevertheless I pay tribute to his knowledge and understanding of the union and the service and I thank him for his long period of service to the union. I wish Mike all the best for his retirement.

An appeal for unity

Following my election, many members and officials have approached me to wish me well. A number of officials who did not support me in the election have said that they fully accept the members' decision and now look forward to working together for the interests of the whole union.

I welcome these comments. I hope all officials of the union will take note of the members' decision and will work together to find improved ways of working so that the concerns expressed by ordinary members can be addressed. We face serious attacks on a number of fronts.

I appeal to all members and officials of the Fire Brigades Union to unite in defence of our controls, our pensions and our conditions. Unity is Strength.

COVER STORY



IRMP cuts 12

The union has slammed fire authorities for misleading the public in a bid to pursue cuts as the number of rescues rises sharply

Pensions 6

Talks start on proposed reforms. The union is heavily critical of the changes



Controls 8

FBU steps up campaign against regionalisation as Government pushes ahead amid soaring project costs



Steve Godward 16

Victimised firefighter living in limbo

AS FIREFIGHTER went to press, FBU officials were continuing detailed negotiations with Suffolk fire and rescue service employers in a bid to find the basis of a potential settlement to a dispute over plans to cut 12 jobs.

"The spirit of both parties in the talks is to maintain and improve the emergency response of the service and community fire safety," said Keith Handscomb, FBU Executive Council member for East Anglia (Region 9).

Suffolk FBU brigade committee took the decision to continue negotiations after considering a report on 10 hours of exploratory talks held on 10 September.

No strikes already announced were suspended since it was agreed to stick by an existing policy that this would not happen merely to facilitate talks. So strikes went ahead on September 14 and 15 and so will four strikes already announced for October.

However, the brigade committee deferred the decision to request any additional strikes to the next meeting and has allowed a 14-day window of opportunity for the talks by setting a deadline of Thursday 29 September for the talks to conclude and a final report to be given to their brigade



COURTESY EADT NEWSPAPERS ARCHANT SUFFOLK

FBU in talks with employers over Suffolk IRMP job cuts

committee meeting on Friday 30 September – two days before the first October strike on Monday 3 October.

"There is a window of opportunity for both sides to bottom-out issues discussed to see if there is any realistic chance of a negotiated settlement prior to both sides moving into the next phase of the dispute," said Keith.

The dispute concerns proposals, under Integrated Risk Management Plan 2, to cut 12 wholetime emergency response

firefighters in a brigade already sparsely resourced.

Although a local dispute, its significance is much wider since it challenges the shift in emphasis from intervention to prevention at the expense of emergency response and the cut of professional emergency response jobs for fewer, less secure and cheaper community safety jobs being pursued elsewhere in the country (see feature article on page 12).

At a national march and rally on 11 August, FBU members and

officials attended from around the UK.

Members and officials are encouraged to send donations to the Suffolk Hardship Fund: Lloyds Bank, Sort code 30-94-55, Account Number 4418949. Cheques should be made payable to The Suffolk Hardship Fund, and sent to our Hardship Fund co-ordinator: Kevin Block, 17 Kirby Street, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP4 4PZ. Officials are encouraged to do the collections, but cheques from individuals are also welcome.

New National Retained Committee secretary

PETER Preston has been elected as Retained Committee National Secretary. He received 1,005 to Leigh Redman's 701 votes. A Retained Firefighter at Colwyn Bay, a day crewed station in North Wales for the past 22 years, Peter took over from Helen Hill as acting NRC Secretary in September 2005.

Peter says: "I aim to increase the membership of the retained section of the FBU, promote and encourage a strong sense of unity, ownership and participation in the union by retained members. I'll be seeking to highlight and help address issues of concern for retained members



including, pensions, the right to transfer across duty systems, recruitment and retention issues, and concerns regarding pay and salary schemes."

For more information about the National Retained Committee and what it is doing for firefighters working the retained duty system visit www.fbu.org.uk.



ANDREW WARD/REPORTPHOTOS.COM

The FBU brought the issue of fire service cuts and emergency fire controls regionalisation to the TUC's annual conference in Brighton on September 12-16, as well as joining with other trade unions in backing co-ordinated action – including the possibility of strikes – to protect pensions.

An eight-strong FBU delegation led by General Secretary Matt Wrack won

support for the demand that the Government work with all stakeholders to reintroduce national emergency response standards for the fire and rescue service that will set both maximum response times and minimum resources requirements.

Control staff (above with Matt) joined officials leafleting and speaking at a fringe meeting highlighting the control campaign.

NJC concludes talks on rank to role

THE National Joint Council has concluded negotiations on the substantive move to a role-based pay system and the Executive Council has endorsed this agreement. This reiterates the previous agreement of the NJC that the development rate of pay, other than that for firefighters and firefighters (Control), should not be introduced until Fire & Rescue Services have received the approval of an independent quality assurance body. FBU Brigade Committees will ensure that the appropriate quality assurance exists before any development rates of pay are introduced. Agreement had also previously been reached by the NJC that if Brigades have not received approval from a quality assurance body, then firefighters and firefighters (Control) should move on to the competent rate of pay after three years.

The quality assurance process is fundamental in ensuring fairness and equality in the process of determining when a member moves from development to competent rate of pay, and supports the internal and external verification processes, which are referred to in the Code of Practice on Assessment. The NJC agreements only refer to the substantive move from rank to role, and the move from development to competent rate of pay. They are not relevant to IPDS itself, which is a training and development system.

Brigade Committees, with the support of Regional Committees, will now actively involve themselves in negotiations at a local level to ensure the NJC agreement is fully implemented. The FBU EC will ensure necessary training and information is available to officials. Brigade Committees will also ensure long-term monitoring

is in place to make certain that the timescales contained within the 2003 Pay and Conditions Agreement, as to when members should receive the competent rate of pay are met. These timescales apply to all members, including those on the retained duty system.

Brigade Committees will fully involve representatives from emergency fire controls, officers, and members working the retained duty system, in ensuring that the NJC agreement is fully applied within individual Fire & Rescue Services.

The NJC agreement also gives effect to pay protection arrangements for individual members who may be adversely affected by the substantive move from rank to role. The agreement is the outcome of the referral to arbitration agreed by the EC. This award and agreement does not apply



to the protected pay points for station officers and fire control officers, which will be reviewed in 2007, as agreed in the 2003 Pay and Conditions Agreement.

The one remaining item upon which agreement couldn't be reached is the circumstances in which a member on a "B" rate of pay could be moved to a post which attracts an "A" rate of pay. The EC has agreed to a proposal by the National Employers that this matter should be referred to ACAS for binding arbitration. The outcome of the arbitration would in effect then be an agreement of the NJC, in the same way that it was with the general pay protection issue.

Northern Ireland legislates to protect firefighters

NORTHERN Ireland has announced new draft legislation to protect firefighters who come under attack. In future, it will be a statutory offence to assault fire fighters as they carry out their duties. The unveiling of the draft legislation followed a meeting between Public Safety Minister Shaun Woodward with the FBU in May this year, requested at Mr Woodward's request. Ahead of that meeting, Jim Barbour, EC member for Northern Ireland, said it was time for "new thinking and a new approach" on the issue.

"The current situation cannot be allowed to persist. A robust package of measures must be put in place. It must be multi-agency and multi-faceted and include measures to facilitate prosecution

and conviction where appropriate."

"A clear message of zero tolerance must be pressed home to perpetrators. Equally, measures to further integrate the Fire Service into all local communities, must be pursued."

The legislation on attacks forms part of Northern Ireland's draft Fire and Rescue Services legislation. Mr Woodward said:

"Launching the consultation exercise on the Draft Fire and Rescue Services legislation, Shaun Woodward said:

"We need to recognise the special problems facing fire fighters in Northern Ireland who have become victims of a series of hoax calls

and personal attacks. I am not prepared to tolerate such attacks and intend to punish those people who think it is acceptable to endanger the lives of fire fighters.

"Those who continue to carry out these mindless attacks will now face the threat of going to court and a possible prison sentence. Firefighters work to protect us, I want to ensure that

they are also given every protection while they work."

The draft legislation, which mirrors similar legislation in Scotland and a strongly-backed



Private Members Bill making its way through Westminster, is out for consultation for a period ending 14 October.

■ National Officer Paul Woolstenholmes was to meet representatives from Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate in September to discuss the differences between FBU and ODFM figures on the number of attacks on fire crews. The FBU and the brigades contacted during a recent FBU research project acknowledge that there is a serious problem of under-reporting in official statistics. One of the recommendations of the Attacks on Firefighters report (available from www.fbu.org.uk) was that more needs to be done to ensure there is proper collection of standardised statistics on attacks. In some brigades, fire crews are being encouraged to report every single incident, but they will be encouraged even more if they understand how the figures can be used.



Negotiations
have started
with the Office
of the Deputy
Prime Minister
after it unveiled
proposals for
a new pension
scheme for
new entrants
into the UK fire
and rescue
service and
for changes to
the Firefighters
Pensions
Scheme.
The union
has signalled
'fundamental
opposition' to
the new pension
scheme and
criticised key
changes the
Government is
seeking to the
existing scheme.



FBU members at the campaigning day of action in February 2005

Talks start on pension reforms

FOLLOWING a consultation period, the Government has unveiled proposals for firefighters' pensions that look remarkably similar to the original planned changes to the FPS and proposals for a new scheme for new entrants. However, it appears to be sticking to the commitment to negotiate with the FBU.

The Union has already started talks with the Government and further meetings will take place monthly, involving all so-called stakeholders. From the FBU, General Secretary Matt Wrack and National Officer Paul Woolstenholmes will be attending alongside our advisors, Thompsons the solicitors.

These negotiations will no doubt be tough. The Union has signalled its "fundamental opposition" to the new pension scheme and criticised key changes the Government is seeking to the existing scheme – raising the retirement age and detrimental changes to ill-health retirement. At root, the Union rejects the assumptions the Government is using as its point of departure for the reforms.

Says General Secretary Matt Wrack: "We reject Government claims that firefighters' pensions are over-generous. Firefighters contribute the very high rate of 11% of gross pay and pension benefits reflect those high contributions.

"Claims of inflexibility are meaningless and trite clichés are taken out and dusted down by ministers to justify cuts – this is wholly unacceptable. Ministers never have been interested in greater flexibility if it costs anything.

"We reject claims that the existing scheme is expensive because of the benefits. All of the pension

contributions paid by firefighters and notional contributions from employers had been spent and not placed in a fund and invested.

"When our pension contributions were exceeding the pension payments going out they had no complaint. It is opportunism for them to demand changes now there is a shortfall and they have to dip into their pockets.

"It is hypocrisy for ministers to claim the firefighters scheme is over-generous and imply that firefighters were not working long enough. MP's pay far lower contributions and can retire on full pension after only 20 years. Judges don't have to contribute any money at all, and they can also retire on full pension after 20 years.

Adds Paul Woolstenholmes: "We welcome the principal of extending pensions benefits to retained members and to unmarried partners.

"But we are fundamentally opposed to the Government's proposed pension scheme for new entrants to the fire service, which it is proposing as the pension for retained members, control staff and others who want a pension for unmarried partners.

"It would create a workforce with joint two-tier benefits with for new entrants.

"We know quite clearly where the Government stands now. We expect to having genuine negotiations with them – and local authorities – in the coming months to secure pension arrangements that are acceptable to all FBU members.

"There will be hard decisions to make in the coming months. I encourage all members to attend branch meetings and discuss all the options available to us to push forward our rightful demand for pensions justice."

FPS: KEY POINTS

No retirement at 50 after April 2013:

"Ministers... have concluded that the scheme should be amended to raise the minimum pensions age to 55 with effect from 2006. Those who retire before April 2013 aged 50 or older with 25 or more years service will be exempt from this change." There will also be no compulsory upper retirement age. It would be possible to work in excess of 30 years, continue to make contributions but with those contributions not counting as additional years for pension purposes.

Deferred pension age raised to 65: "the pension age for firefighters who leave the service early with a deferred pensions is 60... (we)... propose that the deferred pension age for firefighters in the FPS should be raised to age 65 from April 2006, in respect of future service." This affects those who resign or are forced to leave the service before retirement (e.g discipline, capability, refusal to take non-operational deployment). Instead of your pension kicking in at 60, it would kick in 5 years later.

Ill-health retirement: if you are allowed to retire on ill-health grounds (whether as a result of your work or not) but you are deemed capable of taking other regular full-time employment then you receive a pension, but with no enhancement. If you are permanently disabled and retire on ill-health grounds you will receive an enhancement, but there are no further details as to the amount.

A new and worse scheme: for new entrants from April 2006 although that date may be subject to change



HANDS OFF OUR PENSIONS!



LGPS: KEY POINTS

THE Government decided to stick to its commitment not to proceed with proposed changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme in April 2005. Instead they intend to seek further consultation with key stakeholders

The key changes were to be:

- To increase the normal retirement age from 60 to 65
- To raise the earliest retirement age from 50 to 55 (excluding ill-health retirements)
- Removal of the 85 Rule

The Green Paper – the first stage of the "consultation" process – on pensions still remains in vogue. This sets out a whole series of proposals – to be introduced by 2008 – for the future of Local Government Pension Schemes.

Most of which, unsurprisingly, would be detrimental to our members in emergency fire controls who are in the LGPS. The following is a summary of some of those proposed changes:

- Increased contribution rates: varying from 5.5% to 9% depending on earnings – currently 6% -
- Increased retirement age: No clear commitment to protect current members' service and also likely to be hefty reductions in pensions for those wishing to retire before 65.
- Pensionable Pay
- Restricted to basic salary excluding allowances etc
- Ill-Health Retirements – Two Tiered Scheme

The proposals intend to differentiate between:

- (i) Those who are permanently incapable of performing any gainful employment –
- (ii) Those incapable of continuing in their role but capable of other gainful employment.

Those permanently incapable could still retire although a review mechanism could be considered to take account of future improvements in medical science.

However, a second tier of un-enhanced ill-health retirement benefits could be available to those who are incapable of continuing in their role, but who are capable of undertaking other employment. The un-enhanced benefit would be subject to review, and could cease or be reduced if the member took up subsequent employment.

While there may be some minor improvements for some workers, the vast majority of Emergency Fire Control Staff will find any new LGPS to be to their detriment. Make no mistake; the Government are proposing these changes to save money not for any other reason.



MEMBER'S VIEW ON LGPS

KEVIN Hale (above), a fire control officer who has worked for Devon Fire and Rescue Service for 16 years, says: "The LGPS is not generous. These changes are going to make it even less so. Increased contributions for a smaller pension, where's the justice in that? When I started the job, a job dedicated to protecting the public and saving lives, I signed up to a pension. Now they arbitrarily decide to change the rules half way through. They want you to save all your life and when you do you are penalised. I feel very angry. Meanwhile ministers enjoy copper-bottomed, gold-plated pensions. Its hypocritical, its disgraceful and they shouldn't be allowed to get away with it."

HANDS OFF OUR PENSIONS X



*FBU members
petitioning against
regional controls in
Plymouth*

PLYMOUTH EVENING HERALD



Campaign steps up as project costs soar

ON 10 August 2005, the Government announced the site locations of seven English regional control rooms. A day later, it named three companies that have been invited to bid for the infrastructure: BT, EADS (European Aeronautical Defence Systems) and Thales.

The Government's announcement came at the height of summer when parliament was in recess. It was clearly designed to bury what will be very bad news for the UK fire and rescue service and the public it protects.

As the ODPM unveiled where the new regional control rooms would be built it emerged that the project costs had soared to new heights. Late August, Fire minister Jim Fitzpatrick confirmed reports that the government would be shelling out as much as £2 billion upfront. In June, the figure stood £988 million, itself a massive hike on an earlier figure of £754 million. This latest number represents an increase of up to £1 billion – a doubling – in project costs in just two months. Projected savings, Mr Fitzpatrick went on, would amount to £20 million a year. Even by the ODPM's own yardstick, this means it will take 100 years to recoup the investment! (In comparison to these huge outlays, the Government's claim that £6m will be recouped from developers amounts to little more than a drop in the ocean).

This revelation followed new figures obtained under the Freedom of Information Act that show that £44 million of public money will be spent in consultancy

The Government is pushing ahead with its high-risk £2 billion FiReControl project, which will bring about the closure of 46 highly effective existing local emergency fire control rooms.

fees alone. Already £14 million of this has been spent, including paying some £46,000 to the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) – the only organisation in or outside the UK fire and rescue service that has signalled support for the FiReControl project.

The costs of the regional controls project – which will lead to the axing of 46 emergency fire control rooms in England and the loss of hundreds of skilled emergency fire control staff – are wildly out of control. No surprise then that the Scottish Executive has yet to take a position on it and is currently consulting on the issue, while Wales has all but ruled it out.

The FBU is demanding to know the true costs of FiReControl, costs that will result in massive council tax hikes and/or the axing of frontline fire and rescue



DOWNSIDE TO REGIONAL CONTROLS

- **Astronomic and escalating costs**
- **High risk of failure**
- **Cuts to frontline fire services**
- **Worse service to public**
- **Higher council tax bills**

services to pay for it. We also continue to highlight the shocking misinformation being circulated by the ODPM about the merits of their proposed regional controls.

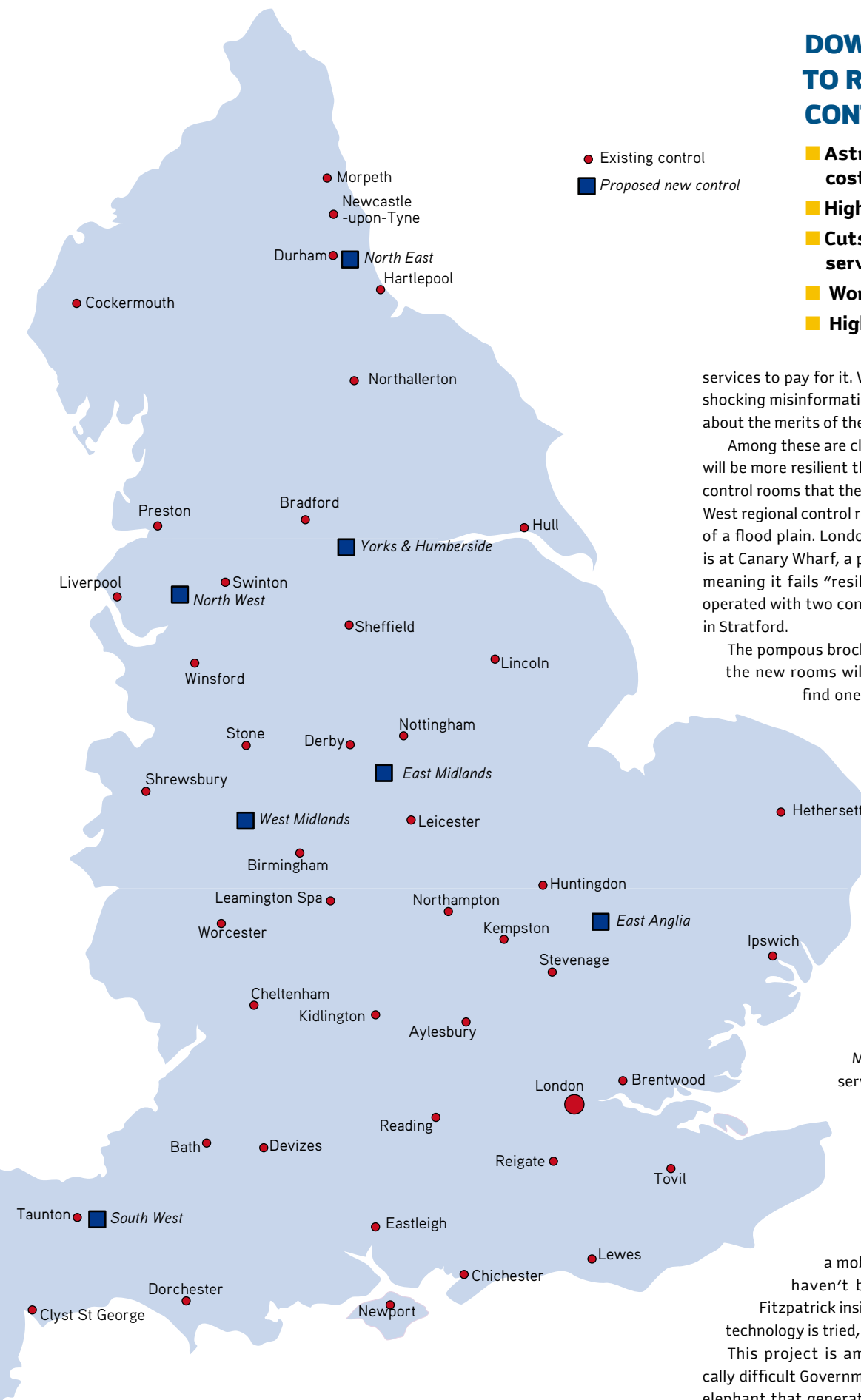
Among these are claims that the new control rooms will be more resilient than the existing network of local control rooms that the ODPM wants to close. The South West regional control room is located bang in the middle of a flood plain. London's so-called "regional" control is at Canary Wharf, a prime target for terrorist attack, meaning it fails "resilience" tests. On July 7 London operated with two controls, having opened its back-up in Stratford.

The pompous brochures released on August 10 say the new rooms will be "secure". Read on and you find one of them is situated at the back of Sainsburys, just off junction 25 of the M5. All the others are sited on standard "business parks".

The ODPM is also pedalling myths about the technology for the new regional controls. It claims it will better protect the public than the 900 or so highly-skilled emergency fire control staff it is set to replace. The technology will be based on IT/computer systems used in Norfolk and Manchester fire and rescue services, the FBU is reliably informed. Control staff in these brigades report difficulties with the technology, most of which have not been overcome after two years of debugging, upgrades and repairs.

Functions such as pinpointing a mobile phone callers' exact location haven't been seen or heard of. Yet Mr Fitzpatrick insists with his bogus claim that the technology is tried, tested and proven.

This project is among the biggest most technically difficult Government IT projects ever. It is a white elephant that generations will pay for in the years to come. And consequences of failure in a service which rescues thousands of people every year - and relies on rapid real time information from controls to do so - would be catastrophic and very public.



IT SUCCESS: CSA

THE Child Support Agency was a dog's dinner until the Government helped with a £456 million IT project to solve its problems. It is now an unmitigated disaster and the Agency has, according to Frank Field MP, reached "meltdown".

He said: "The 2003 reforms, while costing the taxpayer £456m for the new IT alone, have added to the agency's general chaos and declining performance and made an intolerably poor service even worse."

The Government is chasing a technology rainbow hoping there's a pot of savings at the end. It is time it stopped ignoring widespread and growing concerns about this controversial project. It is time it saw sense.

The Union is now stepping up its campaign across the board, raising awareness of the havoc the project would create on the Service's ability to respond effectively to emergencies, be they fires, floods, road and rail accidents or terrorist bomb attacks.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack, President Ruth Winters and National Officer Geoff Ellis have pressed for, and held meetings with Government ministers, including fire minister Jim Fitzpatrick. We have contacted all 219 MPs who signed Early Day Motion 229 or its amendment, calling on them to pursue their demands for an independent inquiry into the project or for it to be scrapped. As *Firefighter* went to press, the Union was also seeking support from TUC affiliates and the General Council at the UK trade union movement's annual conference in Brighton in September.

Devon

MEMBERS and officials in Devon were extremely angry when on August 10 they heard the ODPM unveil the location of the new South West regional control room in Taunton, which would lead to the closure of the county's local control room and others in the region. But they are not defeated, nor bowed.

Linda Schrimpf, 18 years in fire control, is one of 26 in the Devon fire control room. She says: "The members are very peeved off. Members don't want to go to a new regional control room. It's not about location. Taunton is commutable distance. Members are not happy about going to a call centre rather than the proper emergency fire control they work in today. And there's uncertainty about jobs, pay and conditions.

"The new regional control site is on a flood plain – that's been confirmed by the Environment Agency. That means it has failed the ODPM's own (resilience) criteria. It would also serve a population of just 60,000 – not the 100,000 demanded by the ODPM."

Devon members have had some "very constructive, well attended union meetings" and have been very active in taking the campaign into the public arena, says Linda.

"On July 20th we went petitioning in Exeter. That was a massive morale boost. Everyone we stopped signed the petition. They were outraged at what they didn't know – what the Government had been keeping from them."

Devon members also petitioned Torquay on 24 August

and Plymouth City Centre 5 September.

Control members and FBU reps are also visiting fire stations to raise awareness of the campaign among fire-fighters and to encourage them to join the campaign.

"We've been getting in touch with local MPs, lobbying our chief officer and fire authority chief. We are working on building closer links with sympathetic sections of the local media to champion our cause," adds Linda.

Cumbria

CHRISTINE Wilson, one of 20 control staff in the Cumbria control room, says morale took a hit after the 10th August announcement but members are keeping the campaign going, working with local firefighters to raise the issue with the public and keep pressure up on MPs and local councillors.

Over the bank-holiday weekend – 27-29 August – they went petitioning in Carlisle city centre, Ambleside Fire Station, where they were holding an open day, and the Keswick Agricultural Show.

Members have also been pressing local MPs with letter writing and meetings. "We wrote to all local MPs and prospective candidates before the election and replies from some have been very supportive. For those who are less supportive, we'll not leave them alone. We'll just plant ourselves in their surgery whether invited or not.

"Our campaign started in September 2004. In November the county council came out against regional controls. They ran an opinion poll on the website. 98% were against. One of the Cumbria councillors repeated his opposition after the locations announcement. We have obtained 7,000 signatures against regional controls so far – and I am sure we will build on this. Even our chief has his concerns about the [tight] timescales of the regional control project.

"We are trying to talk to as many people as we can while the issue is still big in the local news," adds Christine.

Kent

"IN Kent people are really angry with the Government's proposals," says Sharon Downie, a rep for FBU members working in emergency fire controls. "Over the past few months we've had a lot of hot weather and been receiving a lot of calls. We really wonder how a regional control would cope."

WHAT YOU CAN DO

THE Executive Council (EC) has agreed to step up the industrial campaign against the Government's plans to regionalise emergency fire controls and was to meet in September to discuss the issue of industrial action to support our emergency fire control staff members if the Government does not see sense. Officials are arranging for an emergency fire control staff member to attend branch meetings up and down the country in order for the issue to be discussed in detail.

The views of FBU branches will be communicated to FBU brigade and regional committees, so that the EC can make informed decisions.

- **Members are urged to attend their branch meeting to make sure their views are taken into account.**
- **Also, write to your chief fire officer, your fire authority chair and your MP. Model letters are available at www.controlcare.org.uk. You can email your MP direct by following the Lobby your MP link. The website is regularly updated with news from local media about the campaign.**

The South East regional fire control room's location announcement has been delayed. "Everybody in waiting to see where the regional control will be. We've heard there are technical difficulties. We don't know whether it's to do with a new computer system they want to install, or Firelink or something else," says Sharon, who has been in control for 13 years and is one of 36 professional staff in the Kent control centre.

"We've written to our MPs and local councillors. We've been going to large shopping centres setting up stalls handing out leaflets and petitioning. In Maidstone in July we got 600 signatures in a couple of hours.

Members of the public really don't understand the critical role we play in Kent fire and rescue service or what the Government has planned. So this type of campaigning is really useful. We've had a lot of good feedback."

"We've got more campaigning planned in the Kent area – including hitting Bluewater shopping centre – in September when people are back from their summer holidays and schools are open again."

Both control and firefighter members have been strongly active in the campaign. "We sent a lot of petition forms to fire stations and on open days FBU members have been gathering quite a lot of signatures. Members working the retained duty system have also been taking petitions to their workplaces. It was also a boost to the Maidstone campaigning day to have a pump there – and we hope to do the same in future."

Tayside

LIKE Sharon, Libby Logan and her colleagues in Tayside are still awaiting to hear about how regionalisation will affect them. Libby, who has been working in controls for 13 years, has been active in the campaign against regional controls in her brigade since it kicked off in autumn 2004.

On Wednesday 29 September 2004 Libby and FBU officials Jim Malone and John Duffy, accompanied by some control staff members, submitted a petition to the Scottish parliament and spoke before the Public Petitions Committee, an important route for constituents to raise issues with MSPs.

Says Libby: "Following our petition – and that of FBU Highlands and Islands – the Scottish Executive agreed to further consultation before pushing ahead. Many MSPs and MPs are on our side. The Fire Board are definitely against it. We've got a lot of councillors on our side."

FBU Tayside members have also been busy highlighting the issue among fellow trade unionists in important forums like the STUC. Making the most of the media is another priority. Says Libby: "The local media has been broadly positive about our campaign. We are taking every opportunity to get the issue into the media and raise the profile of the campaign."

Libby adds: "We are all very disappointed that the plans [in England] for regionalisation are going ahead despite all the evidence against it. We hoped perhaps somebody in Government would have seen sense.

"The Government's plans are wasteful and dangerous. They won't save a single life here in Tayside, or anywhere else for that matter. I know that we in Tayside will not let our community down. We are committed to maintain the high standard of service that the public in this area expects. This can only be achieved by the retention of a local fire control."

PA/EMICS



IT SUCCESS: THE COASTGUARD

THE fire service is not the only rescue service where the Government has "modernised" communications. It has extensive experience with the Coastguard where they cut back on their control centres – called rescue co-ordination centres and introduced new communications.

The result was that the rescue centres were routinely understaffed with underqualified staff. The new radio system worked well but the command and control system did not.

The Command and Control system was so bad its use was suspended, or as Captain Bligh of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, told the House of Commons committee which examined the problems there was a "temporary stop" on its "future roll out".

The House of Commons Transport Committee was hardly generous in its praise when it keel-hauled Captain Bligh in its report: "Since 1998, the number of incidents, accidents and deaths in the United Kingdom search and rescue region has risen. The Agency has no clear analysis of the reasons for this."

Closing Coastguard control centres was also criticized: "The number of rescue coordination centres has been cut; the Agency has no clear analysis of the effect that this has had on response times. We are so concerned at the apparent absence of any strategic analysis that we believe an independent review is necessary to establish whether the Agency's actions have contributed to the increase in fatalities around our coast."

Don't worry though, as the ODPM points out in its frequently asked questions section of its website, the control project is not an IT project at all. This must explain why it has already spent £8.8 million in consultancy fees to PA Consultancy which specializes in... managing IT projects.

Not only that (says the ODPM) the public sector is so good now that it won awards at the Information Management Awards in 2004, including the most important award for "Premier Project". We too would like to congratulate Liverpool City Council for winning that award and those many local councils nominated in other categories.

These are precisely the type of local councils who are nervous at letting national Government in the shape of ODPM get its hands on fire service IT.

We checked to see if ODPM appears anywhere in the 15 pages listing the 360 organisations who were finalists in the 16 categories at the 2004 awards. You don't really need to ask, but the answer is NO.

Perhaps they should change their name to the NODPM.

The Union has slammed fire authorities for misleading the public in a bid to pursue cuts at a time when the Service is rescuing a rising number of people from fires and other incidents

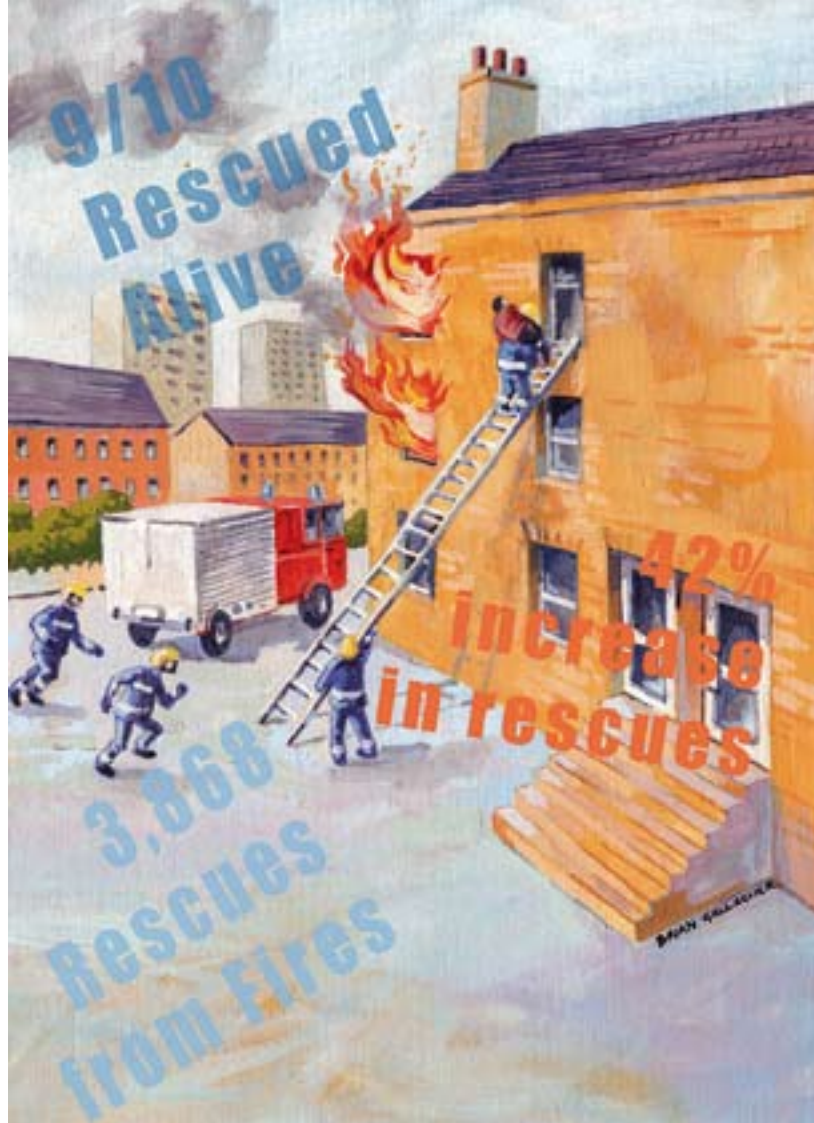
THERE has been a 42% increase in the number of people rescued by the fire service from fires in the home. And nine out of ten are being rescued alive by the fire service. But the Union warned there is no room for complacency or cuts to the service. It said some chief fire officers were deliberately underplaying the rescue role of the fire service to justify cuts.

The FBU called on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to educate chief fire officers and fire authority councillors to assist them in making decisions based on facts rather than widely held myths. The chief fire officer of Northumberland Brian Hesler has recently claimed that 80% of people are dead before the fire service is even called - a comment typical of the wrong information being peddled to the public.

The number of people rescued from serious home fires in England is up from 2,716 in 1994 to 3,868 in 2003, a rise of 42%. These are the last ten years for which figures are available. The number of serious fires in the home has actually decreased slightly over the same period from 66,600 to 63,600 (UK wide figures, not only England).

The figures do not include those escaping without the aid of the fire service or those rescued by neighbours or passers-by. Nor do they include the numbers not at immediate risk who are evacuated.

The research is based on analysis of Parliamentary questions and historical data contained in the official



CUTS COST LIVES

UK fire statistics. Some of the information revealed in answer to Parliamentary questions is collected but no longer published.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: "The rescue role of the fire service has been deliberately underplayed in an attempt to justify cuts in the fire service.

"Strategies aimed at preventing fires from happening are obviously important - but these statistics show that the number of people needing rescuing from fires in the home is actually increasing. One factor may be that an aging population means we have to give more direct assistance as this is one of the groups most at risk from dying in fires.

"The UK has one of the world's most comprehensive and successful fire and rescue services. But lives will be at risk if our ability to carry out rescues is compromised by those who want to cut the service simply to save money.

"Our role in dealing with road crashes, flooding, chemical spillages has been expanded to include water rescues and dealing with the aftermath of major terrorist incidents. We cannot remain as successful as we are while there is a climate of cuts."

'Lives will be at risk if our ability to carry out rescues is compromised by those who want to cut the service simply to save money'

Locally, the battle is on to fight the cuts under the Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) process that started in April 2004. Firefighter reports on three campaigns to protect jobs and local communities

NORTHUMBERLAND

THE fire authority is proposing to axe 28 full time frontline firefighting jobs and to close in the most populated area of the county four fire stations: wholetime stations at Ashington, Cramlington, Blyth, and Morpeth, which has one wholetime and one retained pump. The plan, under consultation until the end of October, is to replace them with two new fire stations at Pegswood and East Sleekburn, each with two wholetime pumps and one retained pump, plus support vehicles. The proposal would cut wholetime firefighter posts in Northumberland by 20%.

FBU member Peter Johnson has been campaigning with his 42 colleagues to try to save Blyth Fire Station, and against its replacement by the new East Sleekburn station, located in a remote spot away from the town centre.

Says Peter, who has worked at Blyth for 18 years, "Our Chief Officer has also stated that response times are now not a priority. He says he want to concentrate more on preventative measures. The fact is we are situated on the busiest urban road in Northumberland and between

its way? Government and fire service figures tell a very different story which shows just how effective we are at rescuing people. Besides, what about the remaining 20%: is he suggesting we write their lives off? In the space of five to six weeks my crew saved two adults in a house fire from an upstairs flat, where they were trapped. We also saved the life of a fisherman who'd fallen into the River Blyth. If the station had been at East Sleekburn, I believe we would have had three fatalities on our hands. You can understand the feelings of frontline firefighters here in Blyth when asked to move to East Sleekburn.

He adds: "We've all heard about modernisation. Does that mean taking a community fire stations away from the community into a field in a middle of nowhere? It's detrimental to the community. This move would alienate us from the very people we are trying to look after and educate. Our location at present is ideal, we actually have organised school visits where the children can walk to the station.

When on community fire safety work, such as fitting smoke alarms, Peter and his colleagues are being questioned by concerned residents about the closure of Blyth. "We are telling people we are totally opposed to the closures. We've also been going out with petitions. We are getting thousands and thousands of signatures and have been handing them into MPs and councillors who are increasingly opposed to the closure. We are

'The public has to decide if it wants its money spent on frontline firefighters or lining the pockets of shareholders'

also seeing more and more letters of opposition in the location press.

Peter says even East Sleekburn locals are opposed to the proposed changes. "They are concerned about the impact on the wildlife in area of the site of the proposed new station. And they don't want the noise. Everything is wrong with the proposals. We are not kicking up a stink for the sake of it. We are really concerned about public safety."

The Union says the campaign is picking up and they enjoy support from Blyth Valley MP Ronnie Campbell, whose constituency will lose two fire stations. But there's still plenty to do to combat misinformation by the fire authority.

Says Brigade Chair, Colin James: "Firefighters believe the council decided to go for Government PFI credits to build new fire stations and then fit the IRMP around them so they can make savings by selling land to property developers and making cuts. The public has to decide if it wants its money to be spent on full time frontline firefighters serving them from local fire stations or less firefighters based at out of town fire stations in order to line the pockets of shareholders, banks and financial institutions, who provide the PFI funding

"The simple fact is that the proposed new fire stations would be moving away from dwelling life risks. We aren't



STAN GAMSTER

Peter Johnson and his colleagues have been campaigning to save Blyth Fire Station

2 and 6pm the road is gridlocked. Our location gives us rapid access to the town centre and major housing estates. The new proposed station at East Sleekburn, is two miles down the dual carriageway. Attendance times as they are now would be out of the window. It would be physically impossible meet them. It's absolute suicide moving the station. I've lived in Blyth for 42 years. The traffic situation has deteriorated rapidly in that time. An out of town station is totally unacceptable.

"Our Fire Chief has said that nationally 80% of people who die in fires are dead before the fire service receives the call. How can you tell that exactly, whether they die before the call or when the fire service is actually on


MICHAEL SEAMAN

RTAS

ATTENDANCES at road traffic accidents (RTAs) are also on the rise, standing at 9,673 in 2003-4, a 13% rise from ten years earlier, according to the latest ODPM annual returns. The numbers are unlikely to reverse as long as traffic numbers and cars keep rising.

The figures relate only to England and are incident numbers and not the numbers of people who have been rescued, which will be significantly more.

AUDIT COMMISSION DID NOT MEASURE EMERGENCY RESPONSE

THE Union has criticised an Audit Commission report rating the performance of the 45 English fire authorities for “completely missing the real point” about the role of fire and rescue services. The report, published in July, did not measure emergency response. The FBU has also criticised the Audit Commission for releasing the reports to the media and local managers two days before they were available to the workforce.

The report only gave two fire authorities “excellent” ratings under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) and said there was room for improvement among half of fire authorities who failed to secure a “good” grade. The Audit Commission, which described the CPA scores as “an encouraging start”, admitted that “they do not make judgement on how well fire authorities respond to emergencies or other incidents.” The CPA assesses fire authorities “corporately”, judging them on “how well they are run and their capacity to improve.”

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: “It’s a great shame that the Audit Commission did not see fit to share their reports with fire service professionals working at the sharp end before they shared them with the media. This is a poor attitude to dedicated emergency service professionals who are working in very difficult circumstances.

“Local fire and rescue services are seen by the public as providing an excellent public service and this report could send them entirely the wrong message. The public judge us by how well we respond to fire and rescue emergencies and other incidents where they really value our professionalism and dedication.

“They judge us by how quickly we respond to their calls for assistance, how well we deal with those calls, how many lives we save from fires, the rescues we carry out and the assistance we provide at other major emergencies from chemical spills to flooding or the aftermath of bombings. That is what the public see as important but this report deals with none of those crucial issues.

“It is annoying that the Audit Commission seems only interested in the process of Comprehensive Performance Assessment and not the outcomes of it. “The Audit Commission appears to have completely missed the real point of what the fire and rescue services are here to do. We hope they can put that fundamental omission right in the future.”

against change. For instance, what we really need is improvements in the retained service. In some areas we are really struggling to get second pumps arriving at an incident in a timely manner.”

“I am very concerned at some of the misinformation that is being put before the public and councillors as we engage in the consultation process. The reason we have had no fire deaths in the last year is not solely down to better preventative measures, as the chief fire officer has suggested. It is also because we have been able to get to incidents quick enough to save lives.

“Union officials have now consulted all firefighters at the four threatened fire stations. Their overwhelmingly view is to leave the fire stations where they are and to extend and improve both Blyth and Ashington stations to provide more facilities for the community.

“This would be much cheaper than the Chief Officer’s proposals, would not require the loss of full time front line firefighters in order to pay for new buildings, would allow those same firefighters to carry out more community fire safety work as well as provide emergency cover and would maintain effective response times that have been proven to save lives.”

LOTHIAN AND BORDERS

IN Lothian and Borders, the fire board is proposing to close a one-pump retained station at Tranent, a one-pump retained station at Melrose and a wholetime station at Marionville, redeploying the latter’s equipment to East Lothian and East Edinburgh. Fire chiefs also want to downgrade a station at Livingston, West Lothian, from wholetime to a whole-time day station, with firefighters working the retained duty system providing night and weekend cover. Twenty-five retained jobs are on the line.

‘Every door we’ve knocked on, people gave us great support’

The Union has hit the ground running with its campaign, building up substantial support during the consultation period that ends 31 October.

FBU member Colin Riddell and his 12 firefighter colleagues at Tranent have collected more than 8,000 signatures from areas that would be affected by the cuts, including Port Seton, Prestonpans and Longniddry. They presented the petition to Lothian and Borders Fire Brigade. “Everybody is up in arms about it,” says Colin. “Every door we’ve knocked on, people gave us great support.”

He adds: “Twelve of us experienced firefighters are going to lose our jobs. It is going to take longer for sufficient crews to reach houses in the villages, which is not good enough. It’s affecting the whole community. They say it is to modernise the fire station by building a new one in Wallyford, but what they should do is upgrade the station in Tranent. We deal with 450 incidents a year, which is a lot for a retained station.”

FBU Scotland retained rep Tam Mitchell says: “Firefighters working the retained duty system are facing job losses, all so the fire board can make savings. Despite the fire boards claims, cutting frontline firefighter posts

will make the public less, not more safe."

Adds Gavin Barrie, Brigade Secretary for Lothian & Borders. "Marionville currently has its own station and is backed up by a station in Leith. The fire board wants to shut both and have a new station at North Leith, covering both areas. But this would mean two pumps rather than three covering this enlarged area. Also by keeping Marionville station, area response times for the first appliance would remain at five minutes. Under the fire chief's plan, it is clearly shown in the risk maps published in their IRMP, attendance times will get significantly worse, rising to as much as 8 minutes."

"When talking to local MP, MSP's Councillors, and the prospective candidate for West Lothian it has become clear that having been briefed by the Service they have been left with the belief that the changes would not affect 24/7 status of some stations when they are actually going to day crewing. The Fire Authority's IRMP document talks about new shift patterns but doesn't say that this means they will be taking a machine that was staffed 24/7 by wholtime firefighters and reducing this to wholtime cover during the day with retained cover at night and weekends. The document is short on detail and long on rhetoric. It is so vague, politicians need to be taken through it paragraph by paragraph."

"We are currently arranging meetings with all political parties, meeting the Tories on 15 September and Labour on the 30 September. We'll give them a presentation on the IRMP so that they better understand the implications. And next time when they attend a presentation from the brigade they'll know what questions to ask to make sense of it."

"The campaign is stepping up. There's been a lot of interest and concern in West Lothian, in particular, about the cuts. A campaign group has been set up and they've held a public meeting."

However, Lothian & Borders proposals' could have far wider repercussions than those of the immediate communities they affect. Says Gavin: "In their first IRMP (IRMP1 - December 2003), the fire board said they would look at a number of changes. But this second one is the real meat on the bone - and it doesn't look at all good. We are already at IRMP2 stage, whereas the rest of Scotland is still at IRMP1. In that sense, what's being proposed at



Coventry MP Geoffrey Robinson: seeking meeting with fire authority

Marionville: 1 of 3 fire stations the fire authority wants to close

Lothian & Borders might be the future of fire cover in Scotland being played out."

WEST MIDLANDS

IN the West Midlands, the fire authority pushed ahead with cuts to 13 appliances at night on September 9, as part of a potentially life-threatening plan that diverts resources from emergency response to prevention.

"These cuts are totally unjustifiable. We are not against prevention - far from it. But fires happen and the fire service has got to be able to respond effectively. Despite the fire authority's determination to press ahead with these dangerous plans, we will continue to oppose them. We've got a responsibility to protect the public. The Union is looking for an injunction to stop this happening and are continuing to put pressure on the Fire Authority," says Andy Dennis, acting chair of FBU West Midlands.

The dangers of such a move in an already overstretched service became clear on the night of August 23 2005 when for one hour the city of Coventry was left without any available fire engines as fire crews attended a total of 11 incidents during the night. Coventry has seven engines covering the city at night - two in the city centre, at Radford Road, two in Binley, two in Foleshill and one in Canley. From September 9, there will only be six engines.

'To think the council tax keeps going up and up and yet cuts mean the public are getting a worse fire service'

Says local firefighter and FBU official Lee McDonald: "Just one more incident on the night of August 23 and the service would have been crippled. Worried emergency callers would have had to wait for crews from Leamington and Solihull. I've been working as a firefighter in the area for 23 years. It's never been this bad. More and more Coventry crews are being knocked off the run in order to carry out fire prevention activities and are no longer available to attend fires. This has resulted in longer attendance times. Adding to the dangers to the public is the fact that crews from outside the city are being relied on more heavily and they don't know the area. Crews from Birmingham have been mobilised to incidents here and have got lost. In one recent severe house fire in a deprived area, a crew from outside the city took 12 minutes to arrive. Now we've these additional cuts it will only get worse. And to think the council tax keeps going up and up and yet cuts mean the public are getting a worse fire service."

Coventry MP Geoffrey Robinson and Jim Cunningham were previously assured by the fire authority that the plans to axe an engine at night were safe. They are now questioning these assurances after the episode in September and are seeking urgent meetings with the Fire Authority. The Union is pressing them to get the fire authority to think again.

SEE Campaign News Page 4 for the Suffolk campaign against cuts.



When sacked firefighter and FBU member Steve Godward won his appeal against dismissal from the West Midlands Fire Service, most thought it was a straight matter of him getting back to work. Nearly three years after his sacking at the height of the pay dispute he is still in limbo, and still being backed by the union in his fight to be re-instated.

VICTIMISED FIREFIGHTER LIVING IN LIMBO

STEVE GODWARD was suspended from duty at Aston Fire station 50 minutes before the start of the first 48 hour strike on 13 November 2002. The 46-year-old faced allegations of sabotaging equipment, organising an illegal picket and claims that he said sugar should be put into the fuel tanks of fire appliances.

"On the day of the first strike, I had booked fit" recalls Steve. "At work, I was asked to pass details of a Risk Assessment and recommendations taken by my watch in my absence onto other stations.

"It was only later that claims about what was said became an issue. This is when the malarkey about illegal pickets and sugar raised it's head.

"The central allegation was that while I was at an FBU meeting I had proposed an illegal picket and that I'd said sugar should be put in the fuel tanks of appliances. This fantasy was only reported weeks later. Forty-one fellow FBU members supplied evidence that these allegations were false."

In December 2002 Steve was sacked for gross misconduct by then West Mids Chief Fire Officer Ken Knight, (who has since moved on to become Chief Fire Officer of London fire service). Appeals to the fire

authority in January 2003 failed, although the allegation about putting sugar in the fuel tanks was thrown out.

Then the fire authority started on Steve's son Connor, then aged three. "Although I had a legal appeal pending they picked on Connor and kicked him out of the West Midlands Fire Service nursery.

"It was outrageous to attack my son in this way. Connor's hospital Consultant warned that it may affect him but they went ahead anyway, which was pretty low.

"Connor is a few years older now and he has faced problems. He has been 'statemented' which means that officially he needs additional help at school.

"We went through the process of writing to fire authority councillors about what was being done in their name by a public service. That not one councilor from any of the parties even responded to our letters and e-mails about Connor which says much about the quality of democracy and political representation in UK plc."

But at least there were further legal avenues to appeal even when the fire authority's procedures were exhausted. The Fire Services (Discipline) Regulations 1985 gave the ultimate appeal to the Secretary of State, John Prescott. Then Junior Fire Minister Phil Hope upheld the appeal against both the findings and awards.

On the allegation of proposing an illegal picket Mr Hope stated: "On the balance of probabilities, we cannot be certain that the offence of proposing an illegal picket... occurred as alleged." On the allegations of sabotage he stated: "it is not denied that Mr Godward telephoned uniformed personnel at four other stations to advise them what action was being taken at Aston Fire Station and inviting them to take similar action at their stations. However, again on the balance of probabilities, we cannot be sure that these calls were not made without prior authority. If no permission had been given, we cannot be satisfied that he made them for motives that would amount to a breach of discipline."

After 15 months Steve had been cleared of all the allegations against him and that should have been the end of the victimisation of him and his family. "I was delighted, relieved and gobsmacked when my solicitor phoned with the news.

Steve Godward with his son Connor





Steve Godward: They singled me out because I was a successful and active union official

Pictures: Roy Peters

"These were trumped up charges from the start and I was glad my name had been cleared. I had always maintained my innocence, but you are never sure of the outcome of these things.

"I felt complete vindication. It seemed to be the end of 15 months of hell for me and my family.

"After the Appeal was upheld in such an explicit manner we hoped that the new Chief Officer, Frank Sheehan, would call me back to work, sort out my entitlements and let us get on with our lives. In hindsight this was naïve."

'What is unforgiveable was the way they picked on my three-year-old son and threw him out of the fire service nursery'

West Midlands fire service brought a Judicial Review challenging John Prescott's decision. This was scheduled for a hearing on 7 December 2004 in the High Court. The union's lawyers Thompsons countered with a Judicial Review challenging the chief officer's and the Fire Authority's inaction and failure to re-instate Steve.

In November 2004, before the High Court hearings, the Treasury Solicitor (the ODPM's legal representative) stepped in and said that to save the court's time and

money they would "reconsider afresh" the appeal.

Solicitor Jim Gardner of Thompsons told Firefighter: "Steve's original appeal was comprehensively upheld and that should have been the end of it. It should have started a process of getting Steve back to work. The Treasury Solicitor has been provided with further submissions in support of Steve's appeal, but we are still waiting for an indication of when we can expect a decision on the appeal.

Steve is not in any doubt why the fire service picked on him. "They singled me out because I was a successful and active union official. They had wanted to do it for years and then found some trumped up charges to do my legs in.

"It's not about discipline, it's about creating a climate of fear: 'don't challenge what management does or you'll be Steve Godwarded.' It's aim is to try and demoralise the workforce to show how far and how low they are willing to go.

"One reason you join a union is so you can fight injustice. Without victimisation pay and legal representation – both from the union – my family and I would have been completely knackered.

"This is a fight for justice for myself and my family, it is also a trade union fight. We cannot allow managers to pick us off when they want because if we don't fight that they will keep going.

"Thanks to the FBU for helping me and my family. Without that support things would have been very difficult."

The Government has moved rehabilitation of injured workers up the agenda. It wants to get people off sickness benefit and back to work as soon as possible. But should trade unions and their members embrace or question it? Tom Jones of Thompsons Solicitors warns FBU members to beware.

Beware the profiteers

THE GOVERNMENT is keen on rehabilitating workers who are injured. So is the insurance industry. It is a powerful combination, but what about the workers who will be subject to this new commitment? Are the very public noises about rehabilitation something that should be welcomed or feared?

Rehabilitation is motherhood and apple pie. Who could possibly argue against getting workers back to work more quickly after an accident? And the legal rules for personal injury cases now require solicitors to consider rehabilitation in every case. But the message for workers is beware.

It would help if there was some agreement about what rehabilitation actually means. Unsurprisingly in a field dominated by vested interests and competing professions there is no clear agreement about when someone is successfully rehabilitated.

Is a worker rehabilitated if they get back to work? What if they then discover that they in fact can't cope because of their injury? Has rehabilitation failed if the worker doesn't get back to active employment but has learnt to cope with their injury, with their family and to engage with society again?

The insurers' interest in this field is, as always, keeping the premiums in the bank and paying out as little as possible (whilst maintaining publicly that they can't wait to get the cheque in the post). For the insurers a successfully rehabilitated worker is one whose special damages claim in any personal injury case – the claim for losses and expenses – is reduced because wage loss is reduced. That means getting a worker back to work as soon as possible.

The interest of the insurers is also to talk up rehabilitation as a real possibility and off the back of that

sell private health cover and insurance that allows for workers to have rehabilitation as part of the package.

The government has a downer on sickness benefits and with virtually full employment ministers believe that no one who is injured should be off work for long.

The main professions involved in the field are physiotherapists and occupational therapists. They want to avoid having their professionalism compromised by being forced into accepting someone else's definition or interpretation of what rehabilitation is. They want to do the right thing.

And out there, there are a whole host of new companies busting to get in on the act. Rehabilitation companies are springing up all over the place. The FBU itself has been approached by one, keen to communicate the rehabilitation message to firefighters.

Many of these firms have a doubtful commitment to rehabilitation and a keen nose for profit. One company is doing the rounds saying that they will get workers rehabilitated in three sessions of physiotherapy. How could they possibly know that? How do they rehabilitate a worker with real problems following a major accident in just three sessions?

From a personal injury perspective the unions and their lawyers have to make sure that rehabilitation doesn't become a stick to beat the claimant with. Rehabilitation must be an option not a requirement in all cases. It has to be real and we have to ensure that injured members are treated by professionals, not by firms keen to make a fast buck from an individual's injury.

Many of these firms have a doubtful commitment to rehabilitation and a keen nose for profit





REHABILITATION IMAGE HURT BY NEW ROGUES

CLAIMS that rogue rehabilitation companies could be a threat to the fledgling market intensified after Post Magazine learnt of a firm touting for business making "ludicrous" pledges.

A senior market source revealed how a company was approaching insurers and legal bodies claiming to be able to rehabilitate a non-critically injured person in just three sessions at £30 a time.

The source said: "Such a time frame is unrealistic."

The lack of regulation of the sector and the infancy of the market means many insurers are unsure which firms to partner with.

At present, rehabilitation firms have no direct regulator, although the Bodily Injuries Claims Management Association and the UK Case Management Society both aim to promote better standards.

Zurich personal injury claims manager David Southwell spelt out the market's fears: "I have rehabilitation companies promising me nirvana and I don't know who can and can't deliver – Zurich cannot afford to get the wrong person."

Simon Margolis, chief executive of rehabilitation provider and medical reporting firm Premex, warned: "As there is no kitemark, people will only find out if firms are any good in two or three years. There are those that have the knowledge, however."

Post Magazine

GOVERNMENT PLAN TO 'LIBERATE' SICK

DAVID Blunkett will attempt to convince Labour backbenchers that controversial plans for welfare reform are a means of liberating the sick and disabled from a "culture of dependence and paternalism".

In an interview with the Financial Times, the work and pensions secretary said that, while supporting those who needed care, he would be "tough on those who take the community for granted".

Medical advances and the changing nature of work meant people were less likely to be "so physically damaged that they couldn't pick up another job", Mr Blunkett said.

The government will flesh out its plans for reform of incapacity benefit, which is claimed by 2.7m people, with a green paper in the autumn followed by legislation next year.

The green paper is expected to build on proposals outlined earlier in the year, which envisaged re-placing incapacity benefit with two benefits for new claimants: a more generous one for the most severely disabled and a lower, flat-rate payment for those deemed capable of some

work, boosted by a premium if those people look for a job or join a training or rehabilitation scheme.

Tony Blair could struggle to get the reforms through parliament if Labour backbenchers believe they amount to a crude attempt to force the disabled into jobs by cutting their benefits.

The green paper is expected to set out rates for the new benefits and the conditions imposed on those judged able to do some work. The level of backbench resistance will also depend on the way ministers attempt to sell the package to MPs.

Mr Blunkett said the government had "learnt a great deal" since its ill-fated attempt in 1998 to push through disability benefit cuts. Reform of incapacity benefit was an important part of the government drive to get 80 per cent of people working age into employment. Meeting that would also help to address the shortfall in pension saving.

He would not use his own blindness to persuade the disabled or Labour MPs to back the government's welfare to work drive. "I am not going to say 'if I can do it you can do it', because nobody is the same."

Financial Times

PARLIAMENT RESUMES in session in October after a ludicrously long summer recess. The elongated Parliamentary recess was supposedly originally planned to allow for major security works to be undertaken at Westminster. One consequence of a long recess is that the Government can also avoid Parliamentary scrutiny of its actions. For example during this recess period the Government had the audacity to announce its plans for the location of the 7 regional emergency fire control rooms in England. This meant that the announcement came without a formal statement to Parliament and thus the opportunity for MPs to question Government Ministers on this issue.

In addition the Government's decision to press ahead with these proposals flew in the face of the widespread opposition voiced by MPs from across the political spectrum. Over 200 Members of Parliament supported the Early Day Motion in Parliament expressing concern about the FiRecontrol project. If the Government was not willing to scrap these ill thought out plans, very moderately all we asked for was that at least an independent assessment should be carried out before any final decision was taken to proceed.

This motion was one that gained the most support of any EDMs tabled in the last session. To have this many MPs supporting this demand demonstrates the very significant level of anxiety there is amongst parliamentarians. However the Government ignored us and pressed on regardless of the obvious risks of the project failing because of inadequate scrutiny of its viability. Time after time over the last eight years we have received reports from Parliamentary investigations into computer project failures amounting to billions of pounds of wasted

PA/EMPHICS



The FBU Parliamentary Group will be using every mechanism available to raise the issue of controls regionalisation and fire cover as the House of Commons resumes business this month, says John McDonnell MP

PARLIAMENT NEEDS TO GET BACK TO WORK

If anything near the scale of the New Orleans flood had happened here would these new centres have helped or hindered?

taxpayers' money. Our fear is that this project will be yet another financial and operational disaster. The test is stark. If anything near the scale of the New Orleans flood had happened here would these new centres have helped or hindered? Many judge that getting rid of the existing tried and tested control rooms would hinder the response rather than increase our capacity to respond in a co-ordinated and concerted way

When we return to Parliament the FBU Parliamentary Group will be using every Parliamentary mechanism available to us to raise this issue again and to press home to Ministers our concerns about this project. There will also be other issues which have arisen over the recess which if Parliament had been sitting we would have immediately raised in the Commons Chamber and which we will now raise at the first opportunity as soon as Parliament reconvenes.

Individual constituency MPs now are reporting back on the implications of the development of local fire safety plans. It is increasingly clear now that the new planning system is a dramatic shift away from national safety standards. The fear is that without any firm national standards of emergency response individual fire authorities are taking decisions on standards of response which are dictated by a combination of budgetary pressures and the whim of the local Chief Fire Officer. The Parliamentary Group working with the Union will be monitoring the implementation of the new planning processes at the local level in order to confront the Government on the question of national safety cover standards. We cannot stand back as MPs and allow a form of response anarchy to break out within the service. FBU branches have an important role to play in briefing their local constituency MPs to make sure they are kept abreast of what is happening on the ground. This information will also be fed through to the Parliamentary Group for us to use in representation to Ministers and for use in debates in the Commons Chambers itself.

We cannot stand back as MPs and allow a form of response anarchy to break out within the fire service

A further worrying move by the government has come to light during the recess. Last year we discovered that the Government was seeking to abolish the Fire Safety Standard introduced after the Kings Cross fire for the underground transport system. This proposal was successfully blocked in parliament but it is now clear that the government wants to bring it back in the autumn. The group will work with the transport union groups, RAT and ASLEF to highlight the implications of this government



Fire Minister Jim Fitzpatrick: FBU branch briefings of constituency MPs feeds through to the Parliamentary Group for use in representation to Ministers.

plan. After the London bombings in July it is extraordinary that any government should be considering abolishing these statutory safety standards on the tube.

During the summer recess a critical issue arose which has immense importance for the FBU and all the trade union movement. The disgraceful behaviour of Gate Gourmet in the dispute at Heathrow airport is a stark lesson for all trade unionists of the need for greater protection for workers to protect them from ruthless employers seeking to drive down wages and sack people at will. This dispute demonstrates the need for the reform of trade union legislation in this country.

Many aspects of the anti trade union laws introduced by Mrs Thatcher remain on the statute books with the result that unscrupulous employers are able to frustrate the ability of trade unions to organise and represent their members properly. Companies are still able to sack workers who take industrial action after

We will be monitoring the implementation of IRMPs in order to confront the Government on the question of national fire safety cover standards

a limited period. The right of workers to take industrial action which is enshrined in international law is still impeded by a mountain of restrictions in British law. Despite being condemned by various international bodies the Government continues to refuse to install the basic right to strike in legislation in this country. At the same time the contracting out of services from both the public sector and by larger private companies has meant that workers who wish to support colleagues working within the same sector are denied the right to take action.

When Parliament resumes I will be raising the demand for a new Trade Union Freedom Bill. The proposition is that a new Bill is needed to establish in law in this country the basic trade union rights that are recognised in international law and which are enjoyed by workers across Europe. Next year we will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Taff Vale legal judgement, which established certain basic trade union freedoms in Britain. Many of those freedoms have been eroded over the last century. Our campaign for a new Trade Union Freedom Bill is aimed at reasserting trade union rights in the modern setting of intensifying and globalised exploitation. I hope that the FBU, whose recent national pay campaign showed up just how restrictive the law is today, will feel itself able to support this initiative.

Costa a lot?

Whilst on holiday on the Costa Del Sol I signed up to a time share agreement. Now I am back home I am not sure it was such a good idea. I tried to cancel as soon as I got back but they say that I am not entitled to do so. They have my credit card details. Am I stuck with my mistake?

FIRST you need to make sure that you have signed up for a timeshare and not a holiday club.

If you have purchased a time share it is likely that you will have been given two options, the conventional timeshare which is an apartment number, a week number and the use of it for more than three years or a points timeshare which is a number of points or weeks, or an apartment size and the use of it for more than three years. If what you have purchased is neither of these but you are promised the choice of a number of different locations where you can take the holiday, then you have been sold a holiday club.

If you have signed up for a timeshare you may be covered by the Timeshare Directorate 94/74/EC. This covers most timeshares in Europe as long as they fulfil the criteria. If you are covered you should have a cooling off period of 14 days, if you are a UK citizen, which allows you to cancel the contract. You are also covered by the Timeshare Act 1992.

If you are outside this cooling off period (which starts on the day you sign the agreement) or no cooling off period is given, then you do not have the right to cancel the contract and the company has the right to take you to court for the outstanding balance. Unless you can show that the contract is invalid you will be liable to pay the amount requested.

If you want to cancel the timeshare agreement but you have not been given a copy of the contract, which will include the cancellation information, you will have up to 3 months and 10 days to cancel. If the written information is provided within the 3 months and 10 day period the cancellation time is reduced to 10 days.

You say that the company has your credit card details, regardless of your statutory position the credit card company may be able to "claw back" any payments made if you have a Visa or MasterCard credit card.

Under the Consumer Credit Act 1974 section 75 if you have paid over £100 towards the total cost of the timeshare you may be able to get a refund as long as you can prove what it is you bought and that you did not receive it. This puts the credit card company in breach of

Each year the FBU handles thousands of legal problems on behalf of members. Here are just two of the issues that have cropped up.

contract and equally liable. It may take some persuading to get the credit card company to acknowledge their responsibility but you can contact the office of fair trading if they are refusing to co-operate

For more detailed information and help, you can contact the:

- Timeshare Consumer Association – 0907 607 0077
- Organisation for timeshare in Europe – www.ote.gov.uk
- VacationOwners Independent Coalition in Europe – 0870 240 8993
- Office of Fair Trading – 0845 722 4499

I recently took a jacket into the dry cleaners and when I went back to pick it up I found they had ruined it beyond repair. What can I do legally about this?

IN civil law dry cleaners are providing a service and are subject to the Supply of Goods and Services Act 1982. This states that the service should be performed with a reasonable care and skill and within a reasonable time. If the garment is damaged beyond repair, you are entitled to claim the current value of the garment and the cost of the service which they had not performed with reasonable care.

You should talk to the dry cleaners first and present them with evidence or come to an agreement as to the amount you are entitled to or refer the matter onto trading standards or a trade association to help with the dispute. The main trade association for dry cleaners is the Textile Services Association (TSA) although not all dry cleaners are a member. They have drawn up a Code of Practice, in consultation with the Office of fair Trading, for its members to follow and have a conciliation service between consumers and member companies if things go wrong.

Ultimately you can take small claims court action for claims for breach of contract up to a limit of £5000. You will have 6 years to make the claim and can get details from your local County Court

If the garment is needed for a certain date, this must be specified at the time you take the garment in and preferably get something in writing to acknowledge you have set a certain date you expect your garment back by. Otherwise you have not made time of the essence and there is no time period within which the garment has to be dry cleaned and therefore you have no legal recourse as you cannot show the time taken has been unreasonable.

- TextileServices Association
Telephone: 020 8863 7755

25-YEAR BADGES



Tim Grant (right) receiving his 25 year pin from FF Julian Bradwell, branch official from Abingdon Station



Sandy Gow receives his 25 year badge from branch rep. Lenny Boden, Strathclyde



Trevor Shanahan (left) FBU ULF Project manager and Alex Kinnear (right) Fife Brigade Chair, receiving 25 year badges from Dave Kay, Fife Brigade vice-chair



Alasdair MacFarlane (right) White Watch, Balmossie Fire Station receives his 25 year badge from Gary Lennie, branch secretary



Tam McLucas of Fife Fire & Rescue Service receiving his 25 year medal (left), from brigade secretary Ian Dempsey (right)



Ray Chamberlain (left) receives his 25 year badge from Pete Wildman



David McNealey, (left), receiving his 25 year badge from Graham Baker branch chair, Johnstone, Strathclyde

Please send your photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk (Please note that inkjet prints from digital pictures reproduce very poorly). Please include **FULL DETAILS** for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/watch etc; where they are in the picture (e.g.: left to right ...); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.



Tony Clark of white watch Kirkcaldy receiving his 25 year medal (right) from Brigade secretary Ian Dempsey (left)



Linda Shanahan, brigade sec Fife, receives her 25 year badge from Jock Munro, regional treasurer



Albert McDonald (right) White Watch, Balmossie Fire Station, receives his 25 year badge from Ralph Norrie, branch chair



Dave Lock receives his 25 year badge from branch secretary Andy Eades

HAVE YOUR SAY Firefighter magazine welcomes letters from members. Letters should relate to articles in the magazine. Please include full postal address, telephone number and reference to relevant article. We may edit letters. Please send them to: firefighter@fbu.org.uk or Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE

0808 100 6061 FBU

freephone legal advice line



THOMPSON'S
SOLICITORS



The line provides advice for personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues. For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

For further help and advice on union services contact your regional office

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Region 1 Scotland	52 St Enoch Square, Glasgow, Scotland, G1 4AA	0141 221 2309	01rs@fbu.org.uk
Region 2 N. Ireland	14 Bachelors Walk, Lisburn, Co Antrim, BT28 1XJ	02892 664622	02rs@fbu.org
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Region 11 Kent, Surrey, Sussex	Fire Station, Coldharbour Road, Northfleet, Kent, DA11 8NT	01474 320473	11rs@fbu.org.uk
Region 12 Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Isle of Wight	The Fire Station, St Mary Street, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP11 2HE	01494 513034	12rs@fbu.org.uk
Region 13 Cornwall, Somerset, Devon, Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Dorset	158 Muller Road, Horfield, Bristol, BS7 9RE	0117 935 5132	13rs@fbu.org.uk

on the move?

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